



BARACK OBAMA

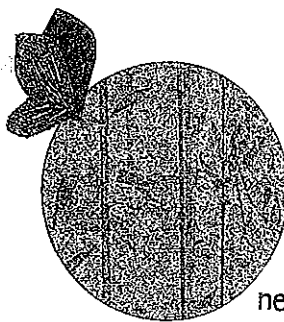
Son of Promise, Child of Hope

IKKI GRIMES • ILLUSTRATED BY BRYAN COLLIER

Simon & Schuster Books for Young Readers

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ne day Hope stopped by for a visit.

It was early evening, and a boy named David sat on a tenement floor, glued to the TV.

"Who's that?" the boy asked his mother, pointing to the screen. His mother looked up from a frayed sofa and set her newspaper aside.

"That's Barack Obama," she said.

"Braco-what?"

"Barack Obama," she repeated with a smile. "I know it's a mouthful. Anyway, he's someone very special."

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing—"

"How come those people are shouting his name?"

"Because he—"

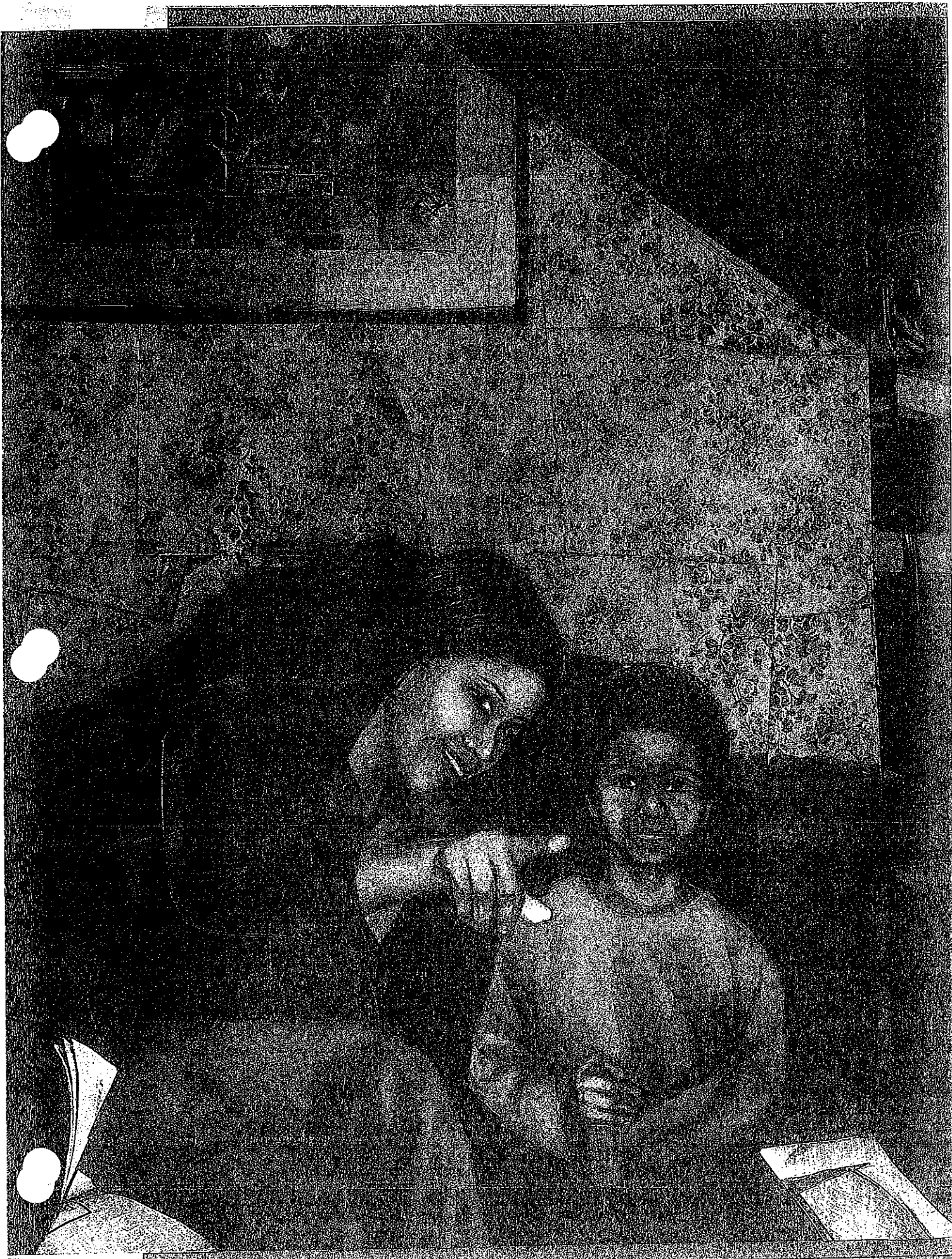
"Are they all his friends? They must be his friends. What's his name again?"

"Boyl You are about to wear me out!"

"Sorry," David whispered.

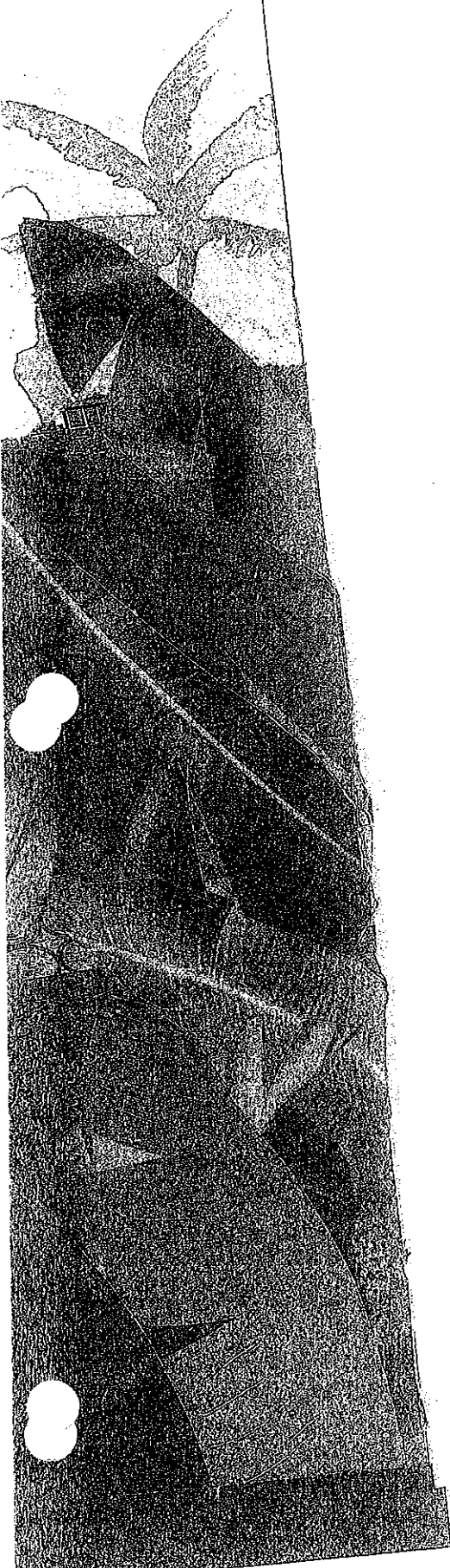
The mother patted a spot on the sofa beside her.

"Come," she said. "If you sit still, I'll tell you his story."



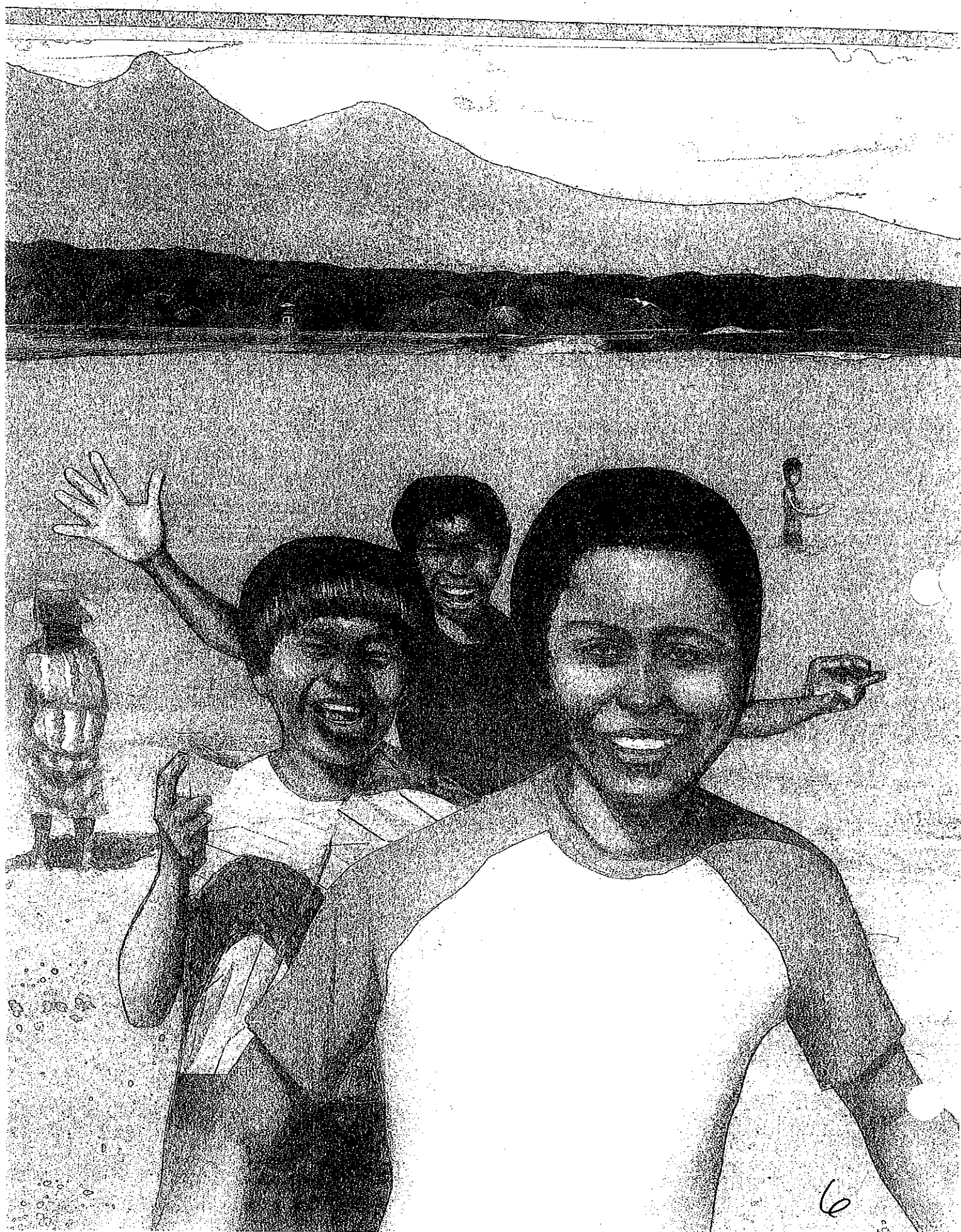
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They used to call him Barry.
His family stretched
from Kansas to Kenya,
his mama, white as whipped cream,
his daddy, black as ink.
His mama's folks, Gramps and Toot,
were part of the first family
he ever knew.
Love was the bridge
that held them all together.

"I wish Grandma and Grandpa lived close by," said David.
"So do I," said his mother.





In Hawaii,
breathing in the scent
of ginger blossoms,
Barry grew—
swimming, surfing,
and spearfishing next to
playmates from places like
Portugal, China, India, and Japan—
and never once did he ask
if all those people
could get along.
They just did.

"Like the kids in my class!" said David.
"You're right," said his mother.



Honolulu looked like heaven.


But even though the blue of the sea
was sharp enough to slice the sun,
and the sun warmed the sand between his toes,
and the sand sparkled like diamonds,
nothing could fill the hole in Barry's heart
once his daddy went away.

His mom, and Gramps, and Toot
told him brave and funny tales of his father's past
to soothe his hurt and make him laugh.

But that didn't stop Barry
from feeling sad sometimes,
especially when he heard the word *Divorce*.

"I miss my dad too," said David.
"I know you do," said his mother.





Barry's mom married
a man named Lolo
and—Oh! The wonderland
he took Barry to: Indonesia,
a land of pet gibbons and pet crocodiles.
Barry laughed himself silly
sliding in the rainy-season mud.

He caught crickets, flew kites,
and joyed in the jungle
at the edge of his new home—
a perfect paradise, until
the sight of beggars
broke his heart.

Barry started to wonder,
*Will I ever be able
to help people like these?*

Hope hummed deep inside of him.

Someday, son.

Someday.

"There's lots of poor people, huh, Mama?"
"Yes, honey. I'm afraid so."
"Mama," said David, "we gotta help them."

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Before dawn each morning
Barry rose, his mother's voice
driving him from dreamland.
Time for learning English grammar
and the Golden Rule.

"Be honest. Be kind. Be fair,"
she taught him.

"Your father is smart and strong
and full of courage.

And you will be just like him."

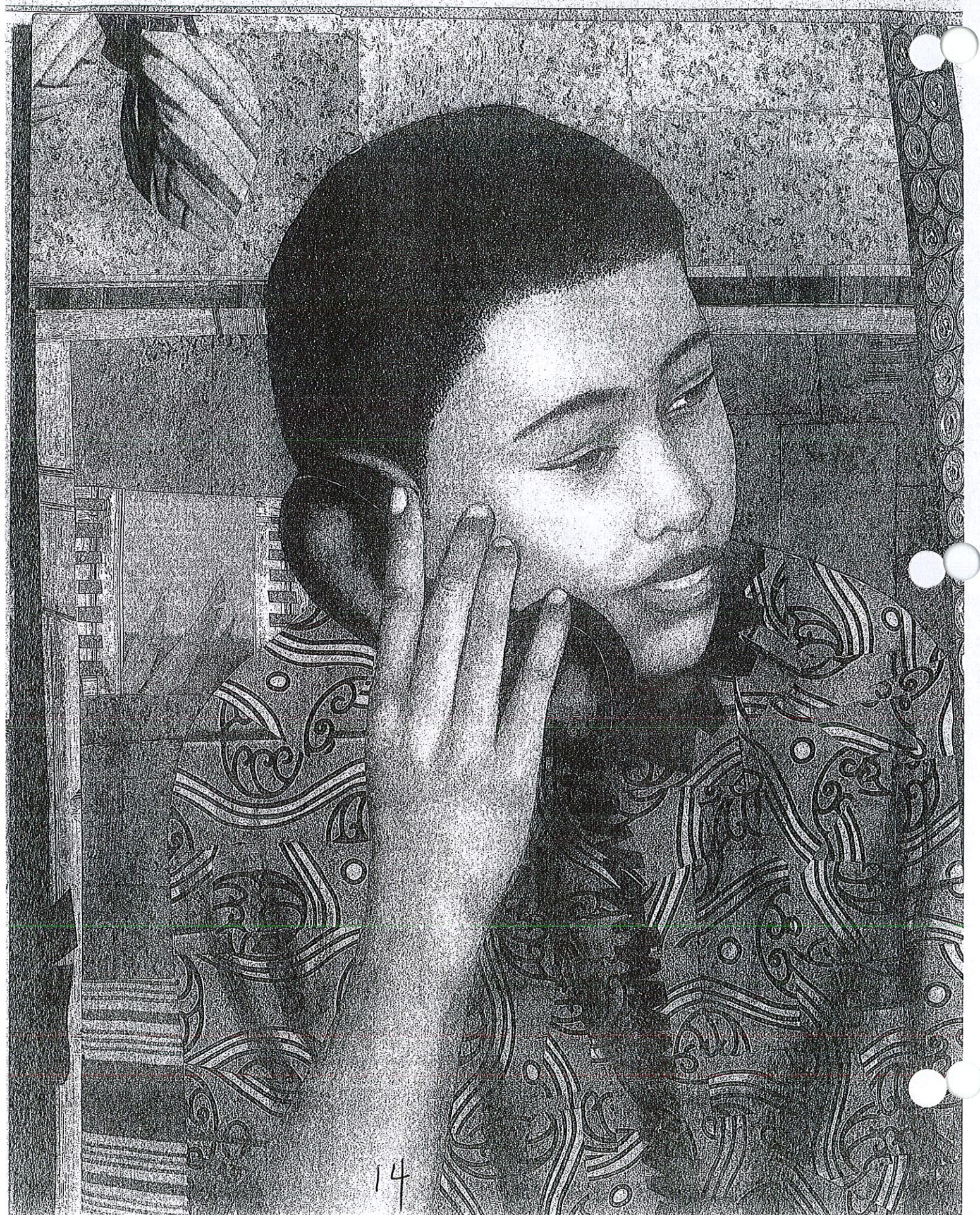
How can I? thought Barry.

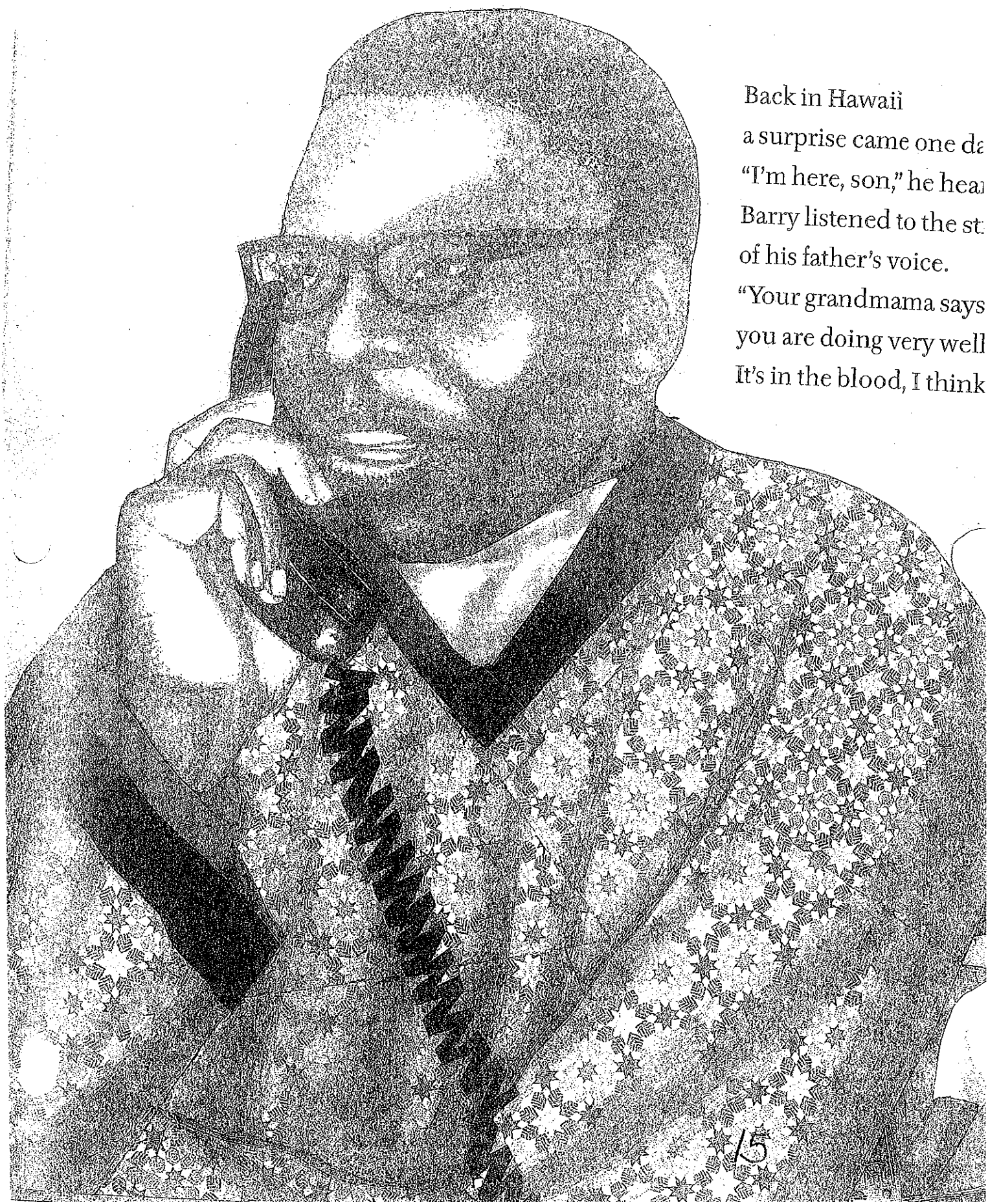
I don't even remember his voice.

"I'm smart," said David. "I can spell S-C-H-O-O-L."
"Very good!" said his mother. "You keep that up!"




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Back in Hawaii
a surprise came one da
"I'm here, son," he hear
Barry listened to the st
of his father's voice.
"Your grandmama says
you are doing very well
It's in the blood, I think

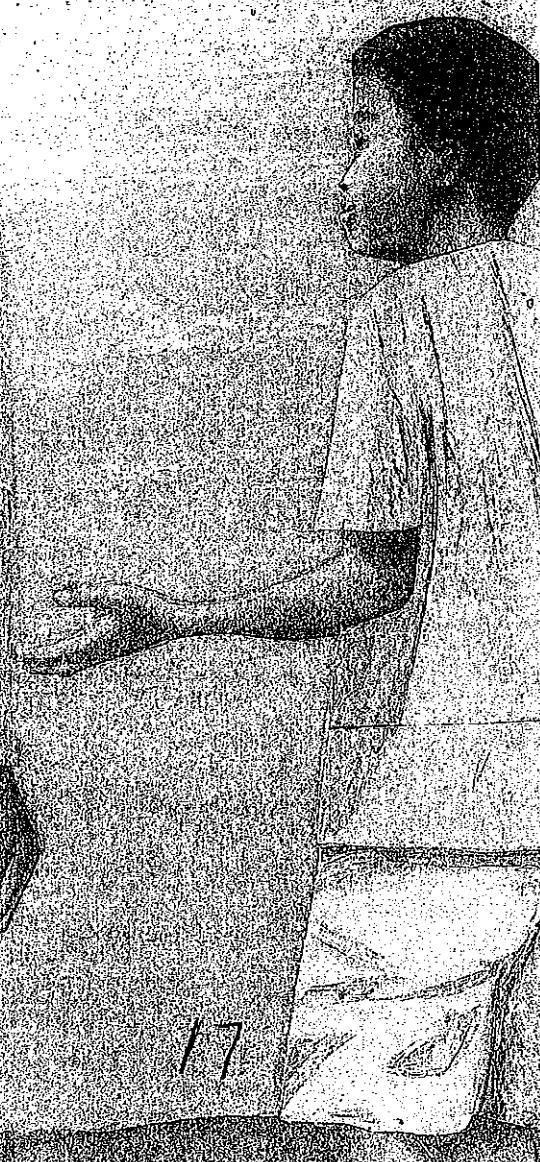
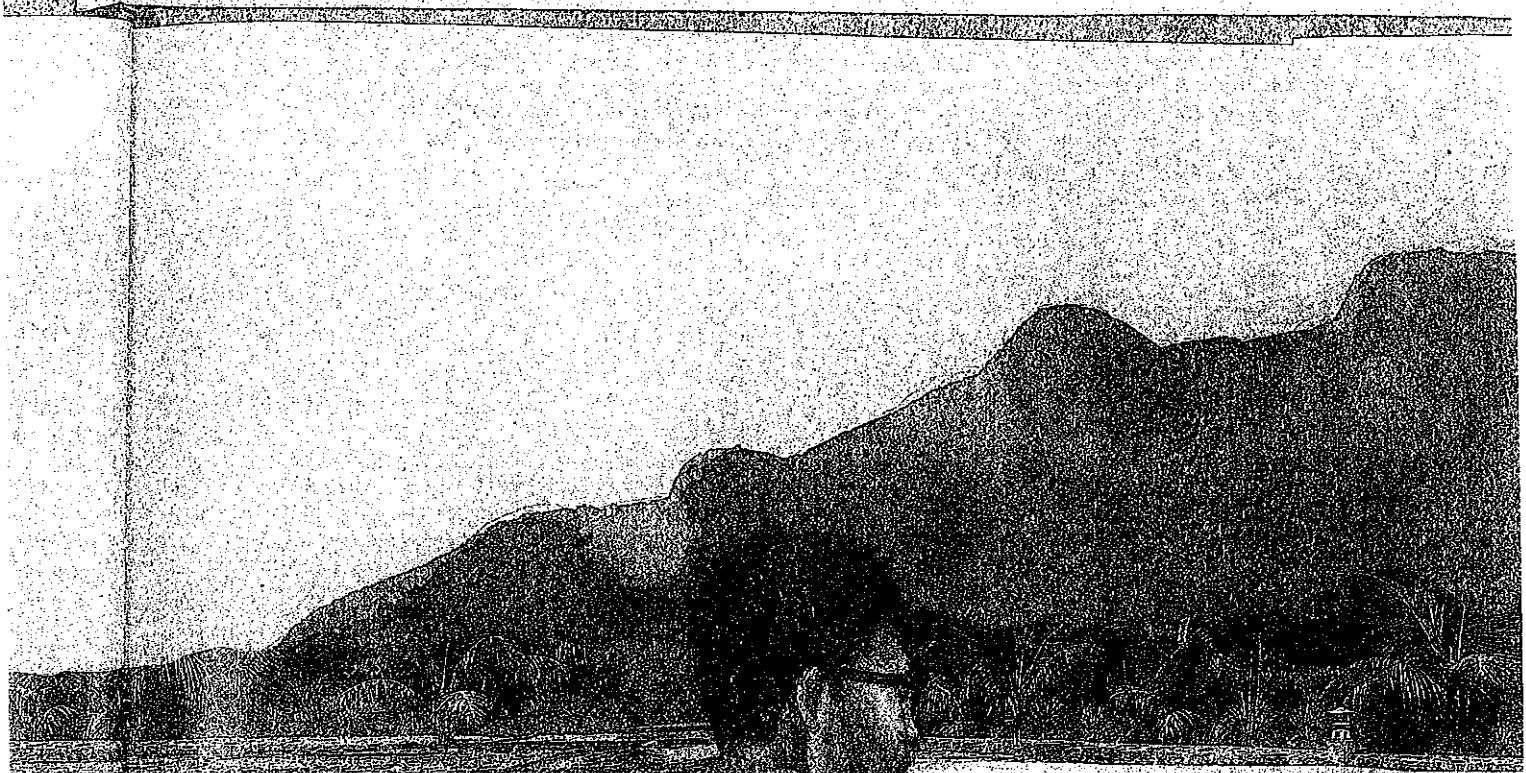


Was this tall and skinny Harvard man
the one who lived in all those stories?
For a time all Barry could do was stare.
As the days passed,
they would share talks and walks.
And then, his dad was gone again,
a ghost once more.

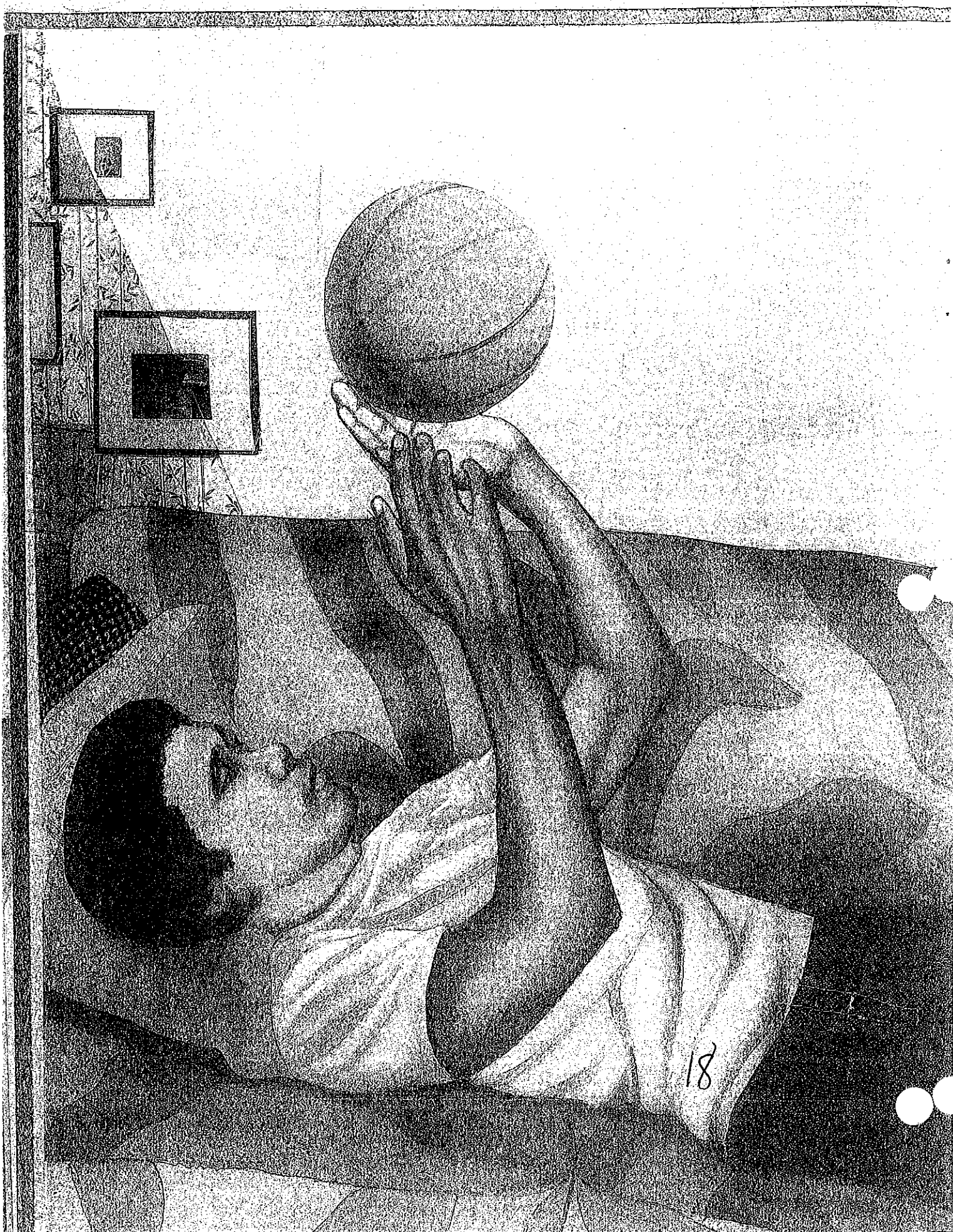
*Hold tight, said Hope.
This strand of memory
is stronger than you know.*

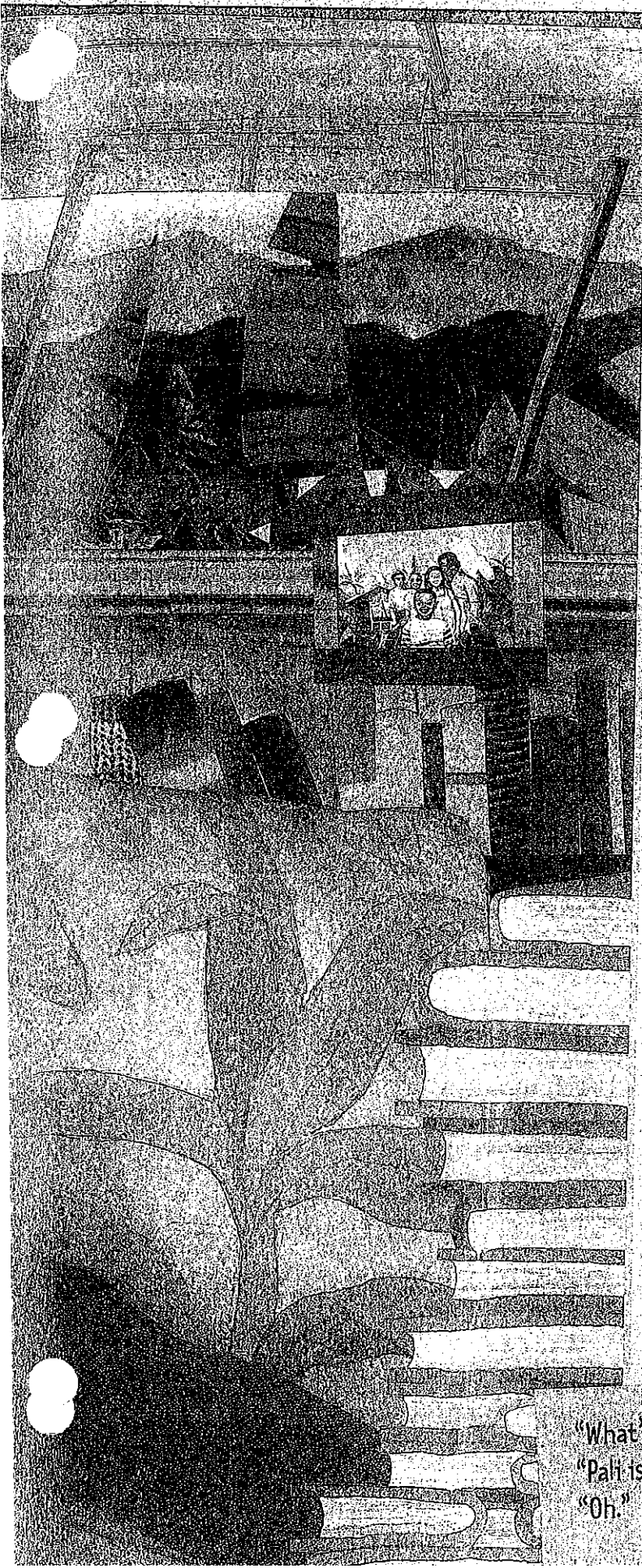
"I wish I could meet my daddy," said David.
"I know, son. But no matter what, you've got me."

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The sun and moon paraded past
Pali's peak more times than Barry's
quick mind could count.

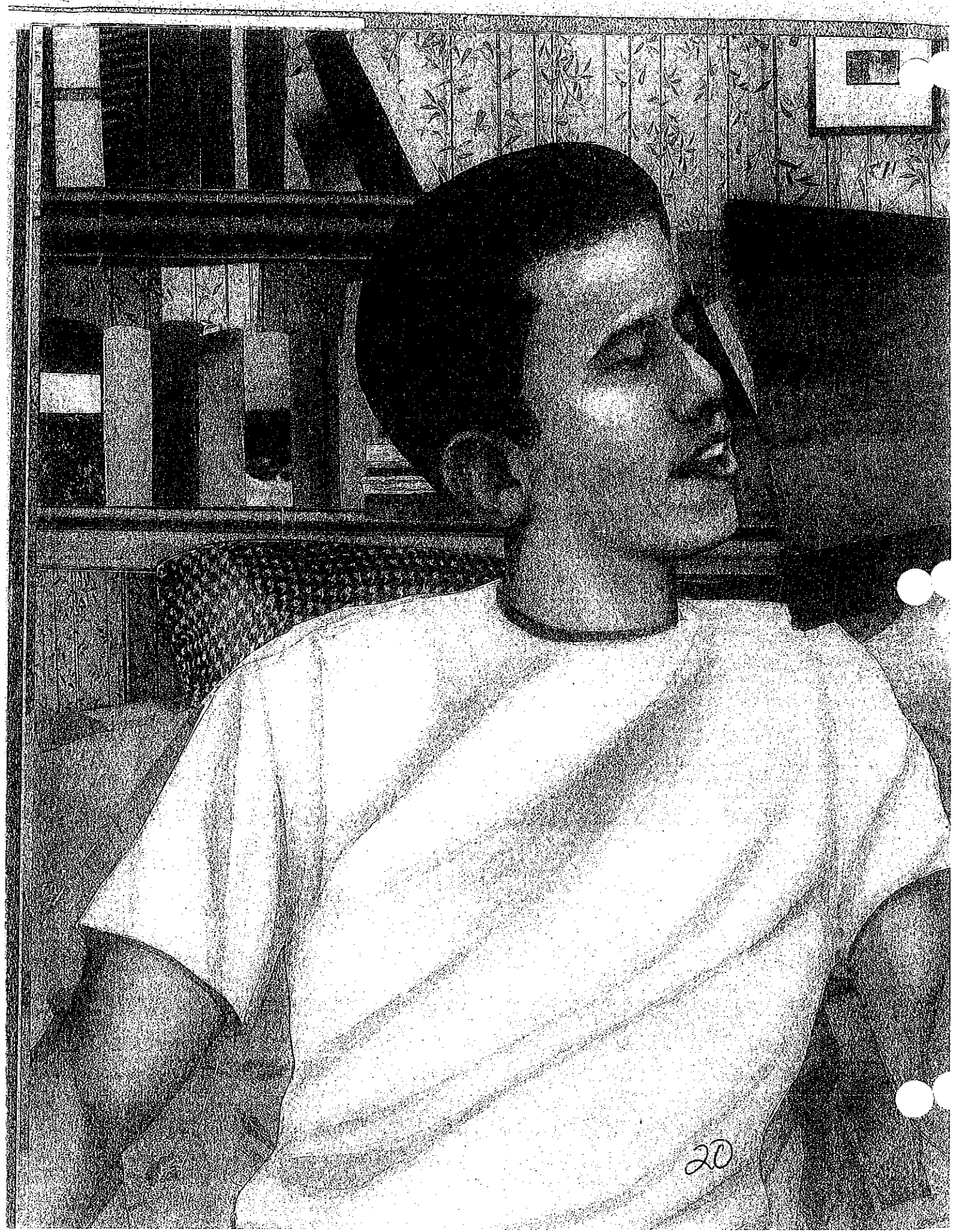
Soon, he pounded across the high school
slamming the basketball his father
had sent him one Christmas.

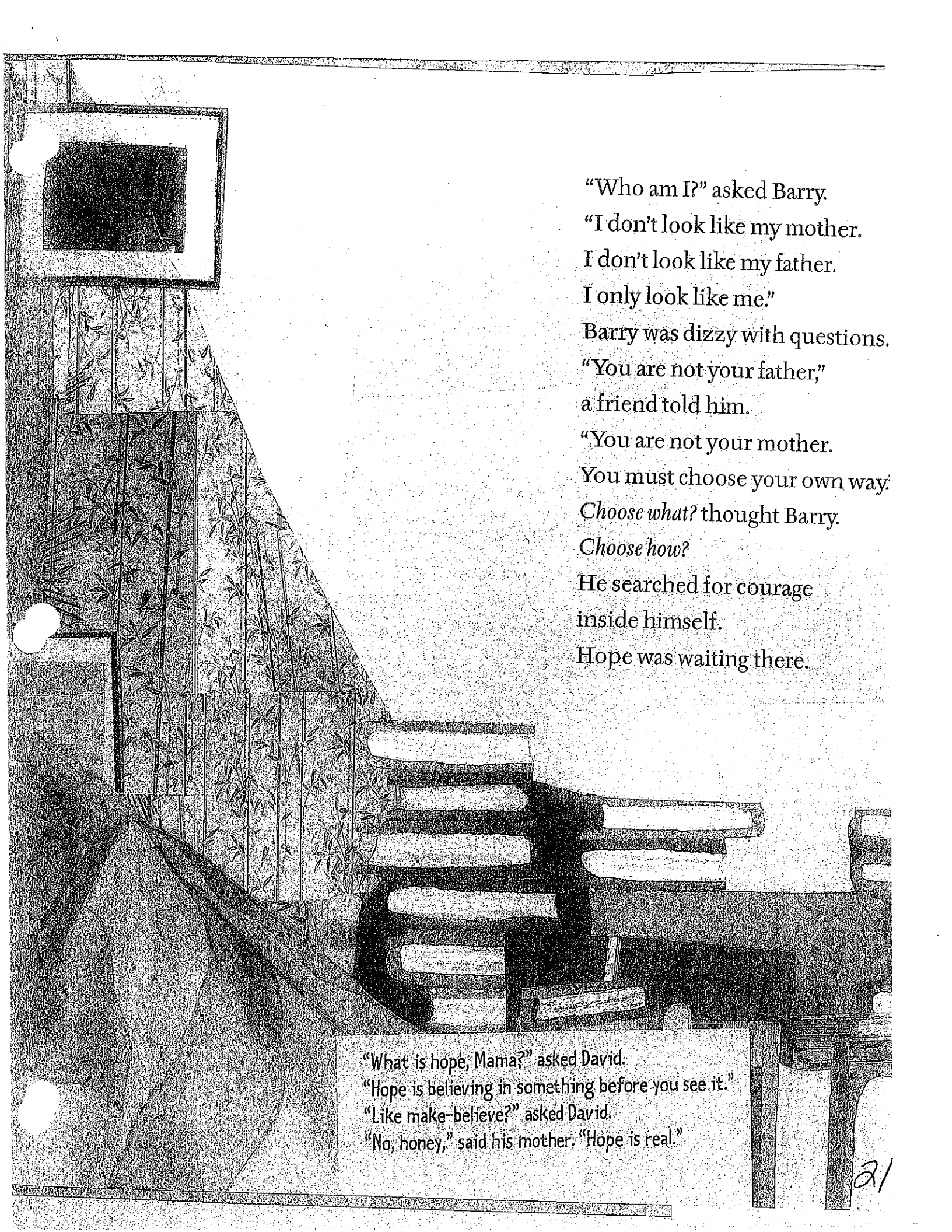
A few letters flew back and forth
from mother to father,
from father to son.

Barry was the bridge
that connected them.

Sadly, some days
he felt as if that bridge
were sinking.

"What's a Pali?" asked David.
"Pali is a mountain in Hawaii," said his mother.
"Oh."





"Who am I?" asked Barry.

"I don't look like my mother.

I don't look like my father.

I only look like me."

Barry was dizzy with questions.

"You are not your father,"

a friend told him.

"You are not your mother.

You must choose your own way.

Choose what? thought Barry.

Choose how?

He searched for courage
inside himself.

Hope was waiting there.

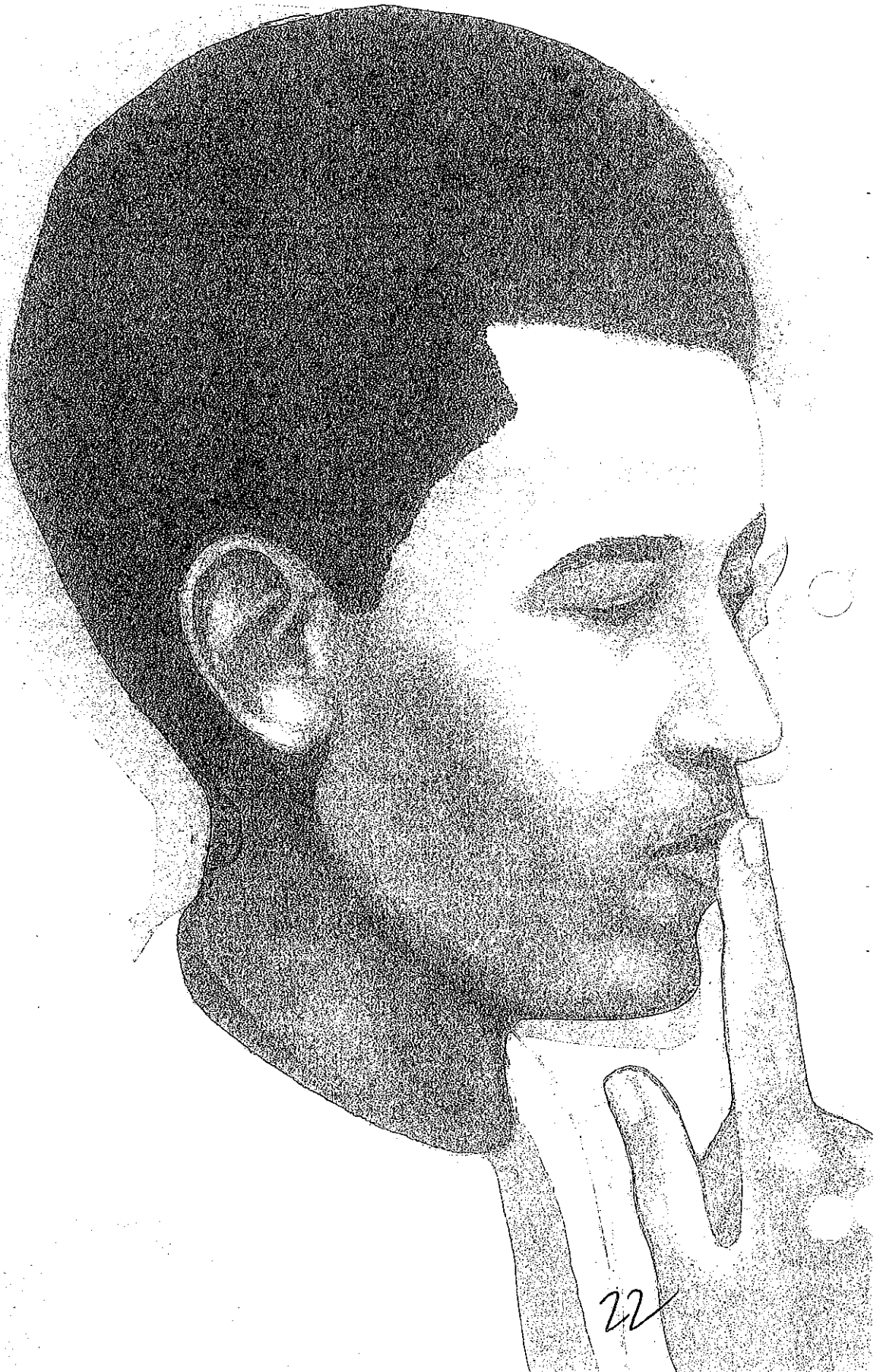
"What is hope, Mama?" asked David.

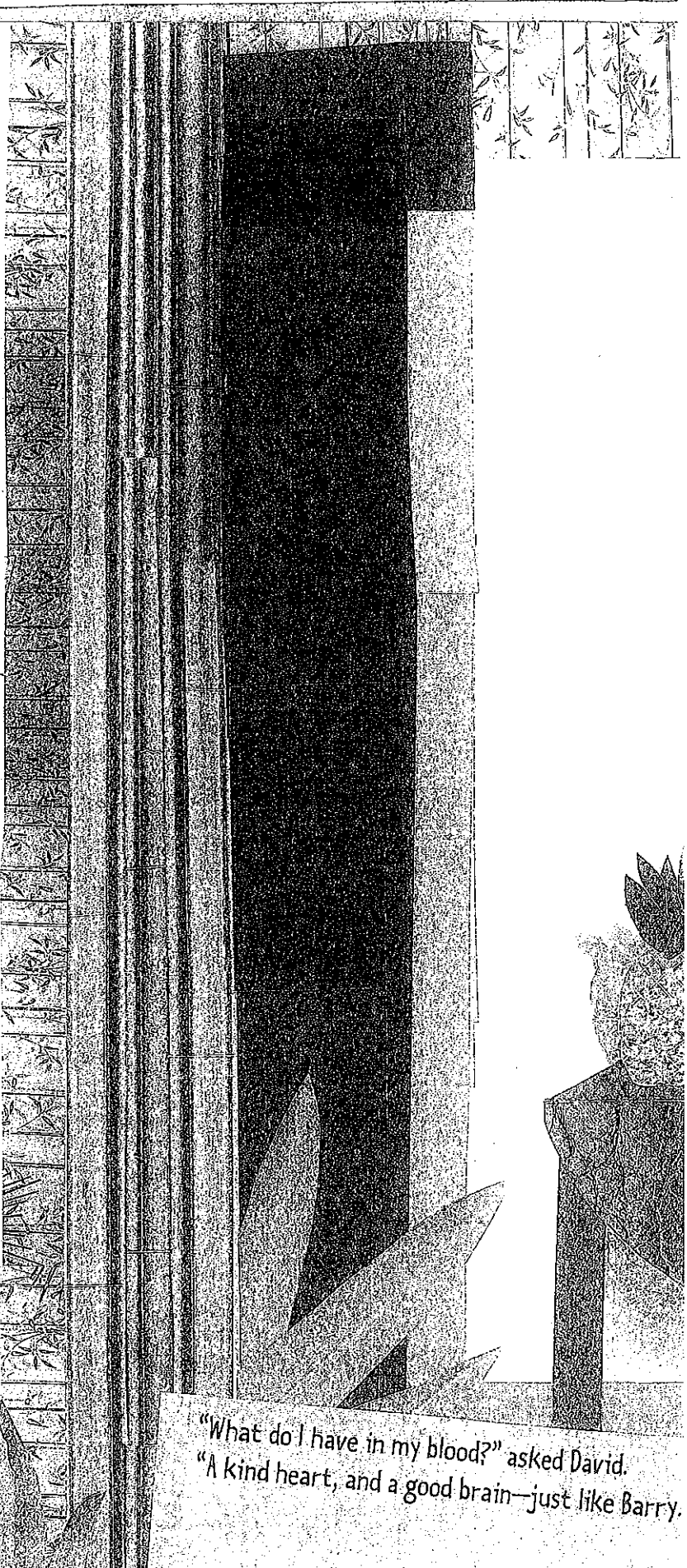
"Hope is believing in something before you see it."

"Like make-believe?" asked David.

"No, honey," said his mother. "Hope is real."

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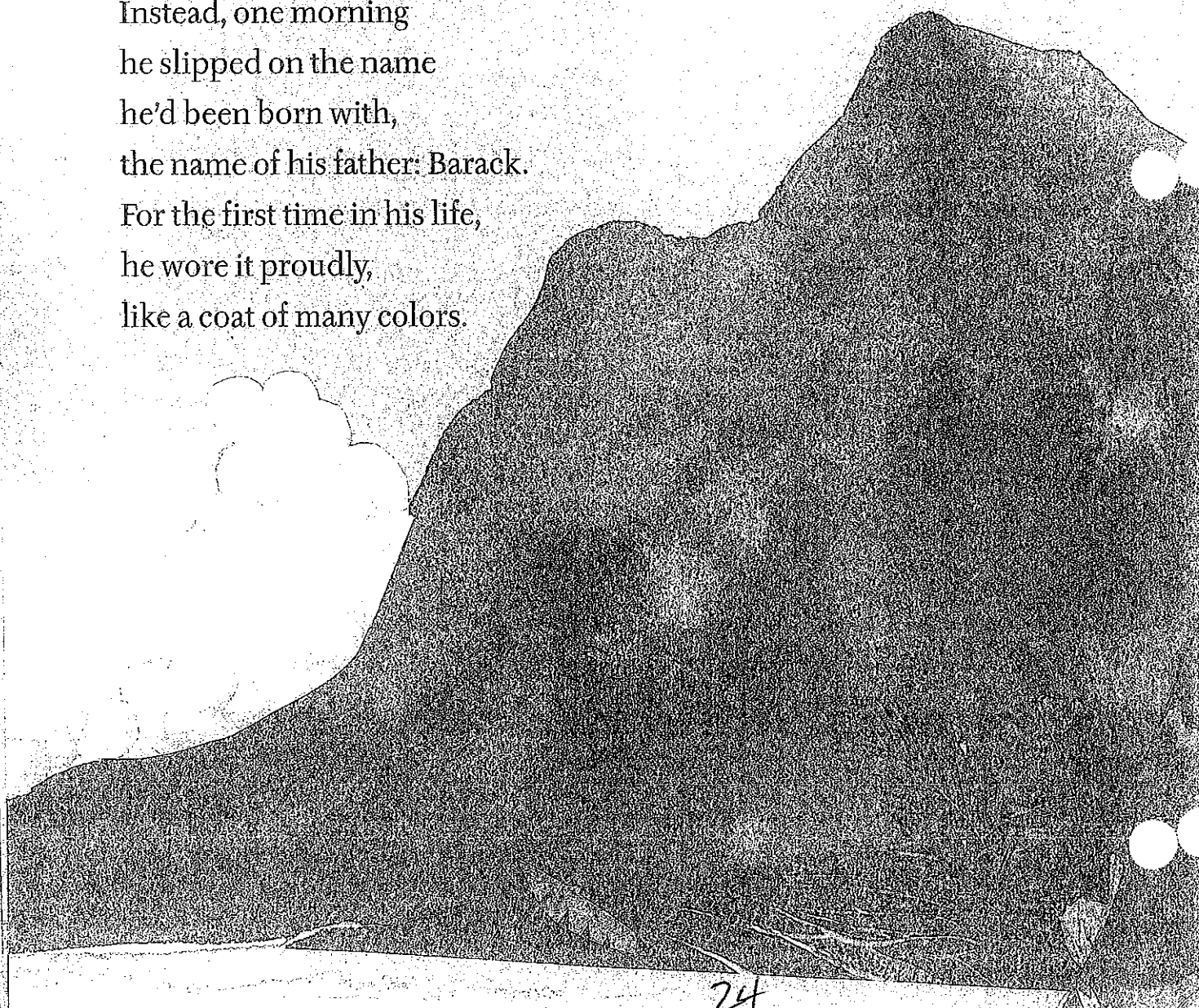


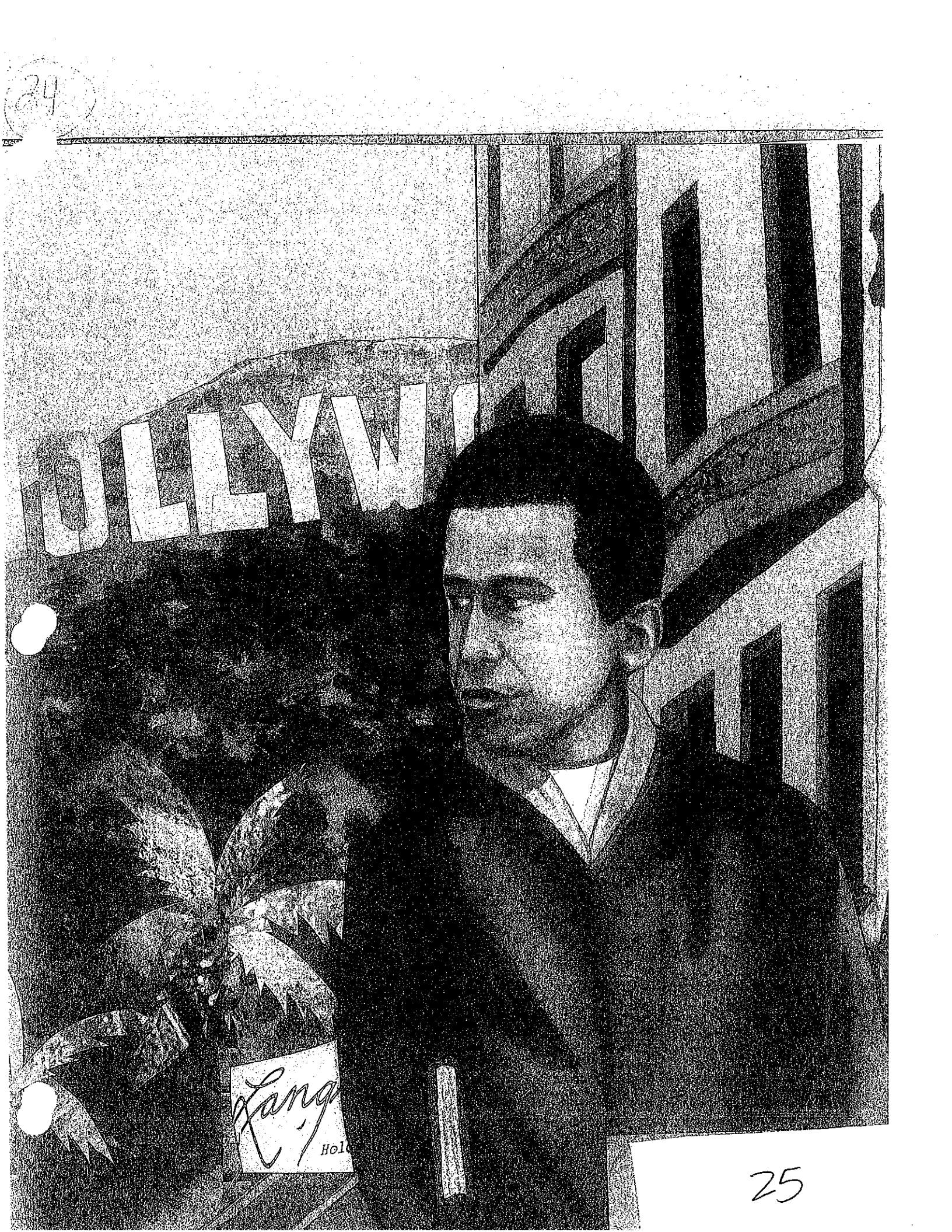
Barry's mind spun like a top.
How could he know
which way to go?
Listen, said Hope. And he did.
There it was! The answer repeating
like a chorus in his ear:
"Education is the key," said Gramps.
"Education is the secret," said Toot.
"Education is the way," said Mom.
"Education is the path," said his father.
Remember: It's in the blood."

"What do I have in my blood?" asked David.
"A kind heart, and a good brain—just like Barry."

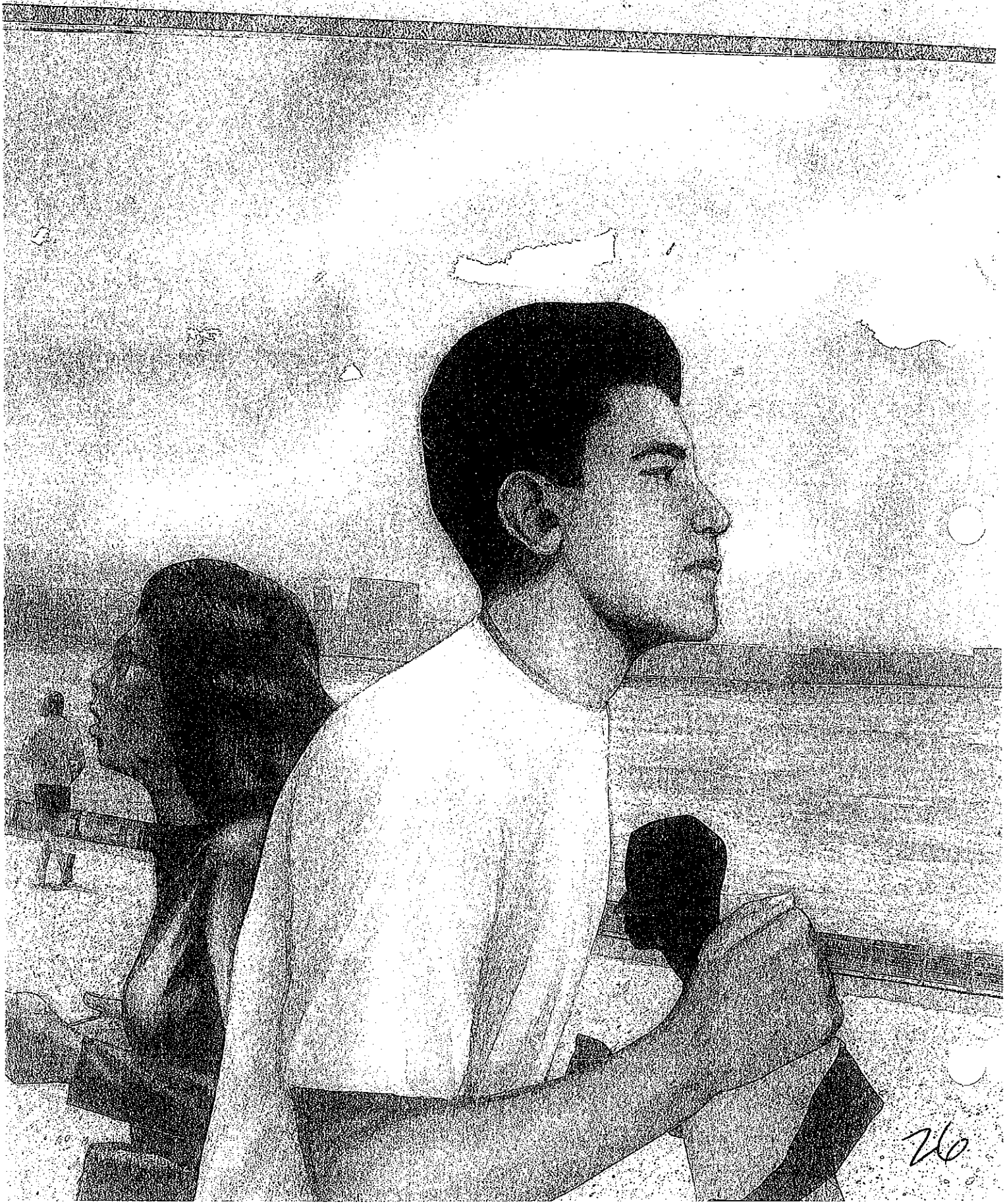
Barry rolled up his sleeves and studied
in the shadow of Pali's peak,
in the shadow of the Hollywood sign,
in the shadow of Langston's Harlem.
Still, he couldn't stop asking,
"Who am I?"

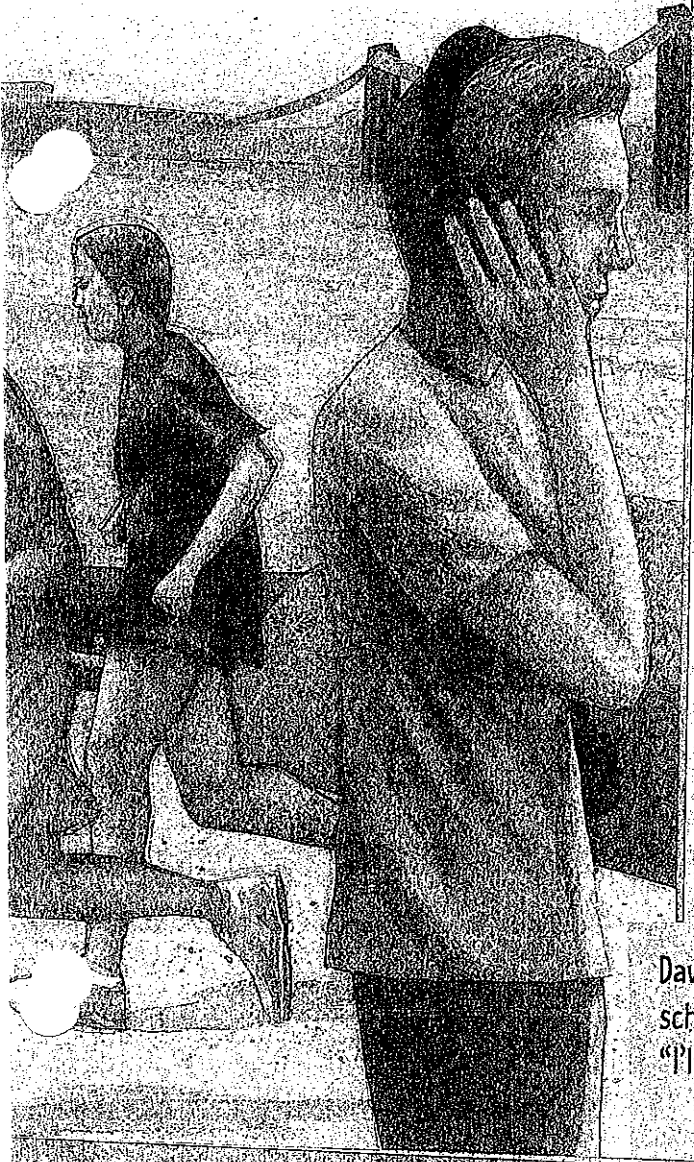
Some called him an ugly name
too terrible to repeat,
but he refused to answer to that.
Instead, one morning
he slipped on the name
he'd been born with,
the name of his father: Barack.
For the first time in his life,
he wore it proudly,
like a coat of many colors.





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When Barack wasn't studying,
he liked to jog along the Hudson River.
He couldn't help but notice
the river of hurt and hate and history
that separated blacks and whites.
Being both, he could not take sides.
Don't worry, said Hope.
I will be your bridge.
In time, you will be the bridge
for others.

David's mother sighed. "Barry's aunt called him at
school because his daddy died."
"I'll bet he cried," said David.





Barack hid his sadness.

Study, said the voices of his childhood.

Watch. Learn. Keep your eyes open.

Barack's eyes saw

the hungry and the homeless,

crying out like beggars in Djakarta,

burning a hole in his heart.

When his classes came to an end,

he raced to Chicago

to join hands with the church,

to learn new lessons:

not how to be black or white,

but how to be a healer,

how to change things,

how to make a difference

in the world.

"Hurray!" said David.

His mother gave him a squeeze.

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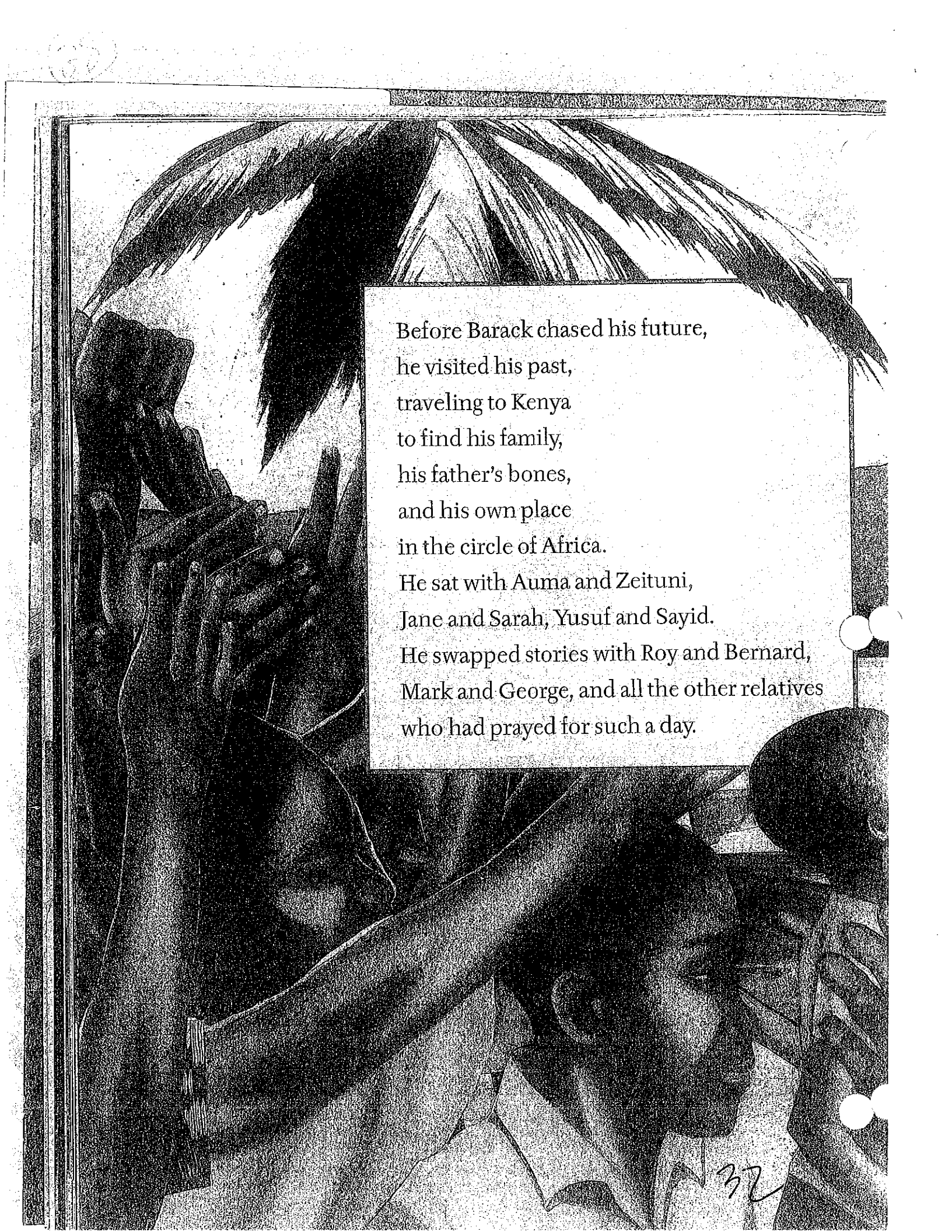


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The work was grueling,
with stretches of failure,
and puny patches of success.
Door-to-door Barack went,
early mornings, late nights,
pleading and preaching,
coaxing strangers to march together,
to make life better for everyone.
He worked as hard as a farmer,
planting the words "Yes, we can!"
like seeds in spring.
Impatient, Barack kept wondering
if those seeds would ever sprout.
He worried that the hope in him
would fade away.

"He didn't give up, did he?" asked David.
"What do you think?" asked his mother.



Before Barack chased his future,
he visited his past,
traveling to Kenya
to find his family,
his father's bones,
and his own place
in the circle of Africa.

He sat with Auma and Zeituni,
Jane and Sarah, Yusuf and Sayid.
He swapped stories with Roy and Bernard,
Mark and George, and all the other relatives
who had prayed for such a day.



Finally, Barack knelt in the soil
at his father's grave,
listening to the still, small voice
that spoke to his heart:

Go now. Fly free.

*Become the man
you were meant to be.*

Live in hope.

*Keep the past in memory,
but shape your own tomorrow.*

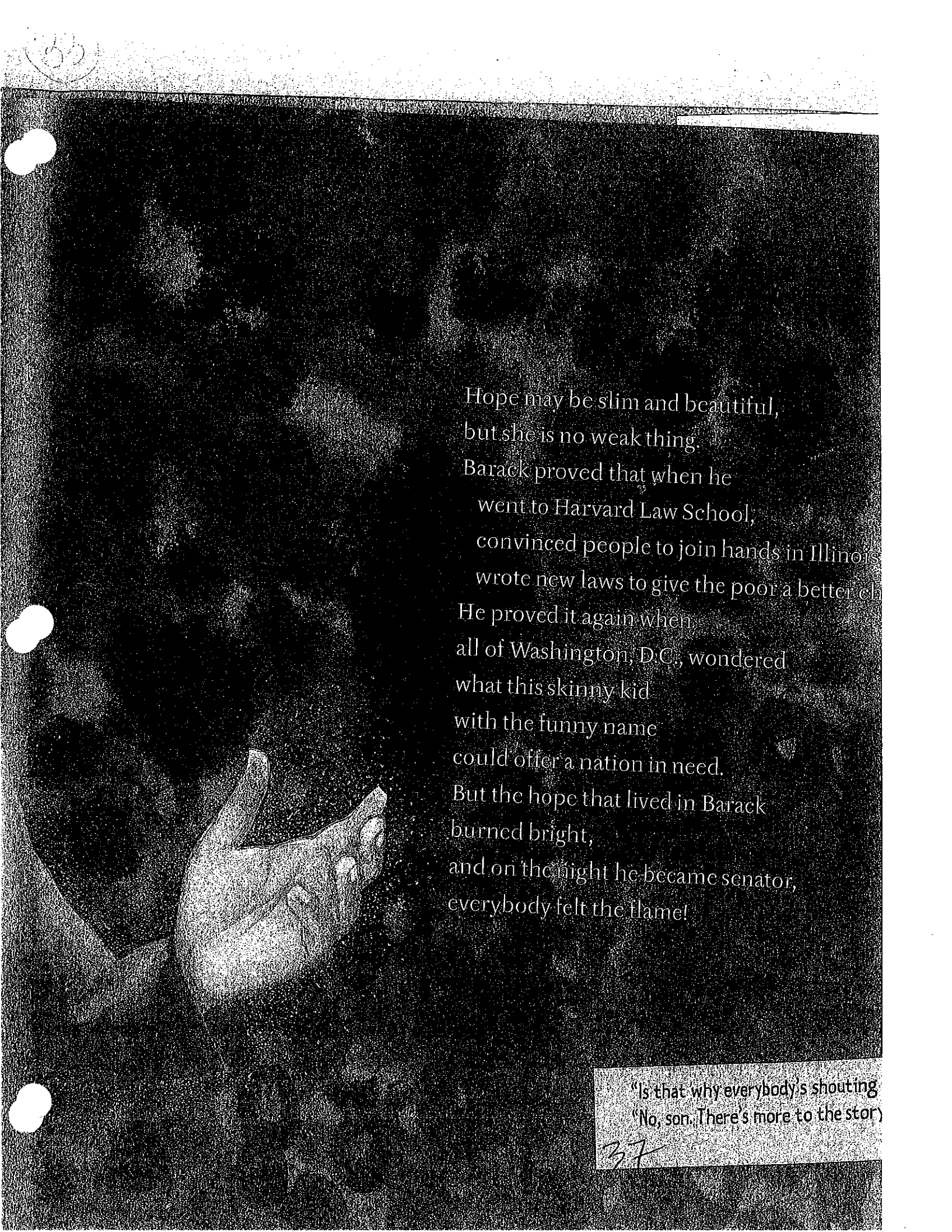
"Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow," said David.
"What's so great about tomorrow?"
"Well," said his mother, "if we have hope today, we
get to make tomorrow whatever we want it to be."

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Hope may be slim and beautiful,
but she is no weak thing.
Barack proved that when he
went to Harvard Law School,
convinced people to join hands in Illinois
wrote new laws to give the poor a better chance.
He proved it again when
all of Washington, D.C., wondered
what this skinny kid
with the funny name
could offer a nation in need.
But the hope that lived in Barack
burned bright,
and on the night he became senator,
everybody felt the flame!

"Is that why everybody's shouting
"No, son. There's more to the story!"

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One star-kissed night four years later,
as his wife Michelle stood by,
Barack smiled on a sea of faces
from Wichita to Waikiki.
He saw whites and blacks, rich and poor,
Christians and Muslims and Jews;
he felt the presence of Gramps and Toot,
he saw the ghosts of his parents,
of Martin Luther King Jr. and JFK.
And on that special day
Barack was the bridge
that held them all together.
"Thank you for electing me president," he said.
"Can we make America better?
Can we work together, as one?"
With a single voice
the crowd called out
"YES! WE CAN!"

The little boy sat silently for a while
said, "Mama, I've been thinking. We
want to be the president. Is that okay?"
His mother blinked back tears, cradled
her chest, and held him there for a while.

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